

JUST TWO QUESTIONS

Remarks by

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Good morning.

Thank you for inviting me to be part of this panel. I'd have come anyway, you know, just to be in New Mexico and attend the X-Prize Cup competition. And if you have any doubts about that, let me tell you about yesterday.

I was up at 5 A.M. and arrived at Washington Reagan at 7:20 for a 9:10 flight. The flight was cancelled so I picked up my luggage and returned to the ticket counter where I was booked on an 11 AM flight. Prior to boarding we were told the plane would go to St. Louis first, then Houston, then Dallas, then change planes in Dallas for El Paso, all of which happened eventually.

The point of this story for me and I bet for some others was that what I really needed was a rocket. When I said that to the ticket agent, she broke into a smile and said sheepishly, wouldn't that be nice. It sure would and I'm thinking, some day, it sure will!

The X-Prize Cup is becoming a premier event in the emerging world of personal space flight. The conversations we're having "here and now" among the thinkers and the dreamers and the designers and the builders help make these days milestone times in the industry.

When I saw that this panel was about Spaceport America and its progress, I actually had to stop and think what I could contribute.

People already know that the FAA launch site licensing process is thorough. It's exacting, open and, in the case of New Mexico, continues. More and more states are getting involved and opportunities are increasing.

The people of New Mexico have been open to advice and forthright in their views throughout. They have taken full and enthusiastic advantage of any opportunity to offer input.

The result so far has been to create a statewide community of involved people doing the hard work required to make the very best of tomorrow.

Obviously, the process isn't done yet. But for those of us at the Office of Commercial Space Transportation it's been a pleasure working with the people of New Mexico. We have every confidence that the same kind of hard working congenial environment will continue as the process goes forward.

So, instead of focusing further on the process today, I thought I'd use this time to address two questions people frequently ask ... not necessarily about the specifics of New Mexico ... but about the personal spaceflight effort in general.

Here are the two questions.

First, why does all this seem to be taking so long?

Sometimes I'm tempted to say, particularly to the cynics "because it's worth it" ... which is basically the answer to the second question: Is it?

You might even have a third one, as in ... isn't it a little late to be asking the first two?

The answer to that one of course would be, no, it isn't too late. It's always appropriate to ask questions any time. In fact, I don't know of a single successful business that ever stops questioning itself, adjusting, adapting, or working on plans to try new things.

More to the point on the question of how long it's taking to get private human space flight fully underway, let me read you something. It's pretty old and involves two rock stars of science even before it was called "science." This is an excerpt from a letter that Johannes Kepler wrote to Galileo.

I'll quote.

“Let us create vessels and sails adjusted to the heavenly ether,” Kepler wrote, “and there will be plenty of people unafraid of the empty wastes. In the meantime, we shall prepare for the brave sky-travelers ...”

I admit it’s not language designed for text messaging. But four hundred years later the objectives described in the letter are pretty much what we’re doing, right here, right now ... and in other states and in other buildings around the country.

It’s a “given” that the quest for personal space flight isn’t easy and the calendar doesn’t always pay attention to hopes or the “best laid plans.” We all know that. The Orteig Prize, for example, was available for eight years before Lindbergh won it. Then, it was five more years before anybody soloed across the Atlantic again. Today, the Airbus A380 delivery schedule is running about two years behind plan and the 787 will be six months later than scheduled.

Daring projects like these ... projects like citizen spaceflight ... take time. But it’s literally the kind of time that flies. As a matter of fact, not long ago, I was reading a book and came to a chapter that began with a sobering reminder of how fast things really do move. “Soon there will be no one who remembers when spaceflight was still a dream,” it said.

If that sounds a little frightening ... that someday no one living will remember the days before people flew in space ... we can all be reassured that there’s a considerable number of individuals still determined to make that dream their own.

My point here is very basic. If this takes more time than we expected, it just gives us more time to get it right. If there are delays, they will stem from the industry’s commitment to excellence. That’s good for everybody. And we’re further along in this phase of commercial spaceflight than aviation was at its start.

For now, we’re so close we can almost hear the engines and see the private passengers arriving. We’ve never been this close before. So we’re getting there and when we arrive, we can be certain that the timetable will have “safety” written all over it.

Now let me return to the second question. Is it worth it?

In plain English, the answer is ... absolutely!

You would get the same emphatic answer in plain Chinese, plain French, Hindi, Japanese or Russian.

It's like what Deputy DOT Administrator, Thomas Barrett told us two weeks ago at the meeting of the Commercial Space Transportation Advisory Committee. "Commercial space is a valuable franchise," he said, "and we are not the only ones who know it."

What we do know already is that as of 2004, commercial space generated \$98 billion in economic activity, accounted for well over half a million jobs, and generated over \$25 billion in revenues. And though the financial path may not be a straight diagonal line, the future will make this a growth industry.

With that amount of money and those kinds of jobs at stake, not to mention leadership in the technology of tomorrow ... yes, I'd say it's definitely worth it.

So, what about tomorrow? Where will we be a dozen years from now in commercial space and, more specifically, private human space flight?

Let me make two points.

To begin with, space flight is a permanent part of our lives.

That's important. Space flight is permanently with us and what we make of it will go a long way in determining what we make of our country. Space isn't something to try and then lay aside because if we do, that's where we'll end up ... on the sidelines. Space is here and it's only going to grow in importance.

The second point ... well, the second point is very simple but very profound since it's at the heart of tomorrow when it comes to spaceports.

And here's the point.

Spaceports have great possibilities for the states. Those spaceports will mean jobs. They will mean forging an identity with the shining edge of advancement. They will stand for leadership in the kind of hard enterprise ... spaceflight ... that sets the United States apart from the rest of the world, that marks the "quality line" between "extremely good" and "the best there is."

If this prospect isn't already exciting enough, there's also the fact that there is no formula for how to do it. Yes, there are the licensing requirements. But after that, the kind of spaceport ... the kind of space future that emerges ... is a product of the intersecting imaginations of the people who build it, support it and use it. I think there is that kind of excitement in all of us or we would not do what we do.

We all know there are skeptics. But I prefer to think of those poor souls as potential converts.

I've read somewhere that Joseph Campbell has pointed out that in myths from all over the world, the quest for fire occurred not because anybody knew the practical application of fire, but rather because fire was fascinating.

Well, private human spaceflight is no myth. We may not yet be able to see the full range of practical applications, but what worked for fire will work for space. In any case, space flight certainly is fascinating, and it's waiting for us right now.

We're working on it. Just look around.

Thank you very much.